

Frequently Asked Questions about the New Stormwater Management Program

This list of questions relates to issues that have been raised by Burlington residents and the public in cities all across the country regarding municipal stormwater utilities. The City Council has approved the implementation of a local stormwater utility fee intended to provide a stable source of revenue to support the implementation of a stormwater management program for Burlington.

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- 4.5 My property is at the bottom of a hill, and not the cause of increased flooding from uphill. Why do I have to pay this fee?
- 4.6 Why is the fee not assessed according to the actual amount of impervious surface on a lot, rather than on a flat fee basis.

1. Stormwater Management Basics

1.1 What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is runoff that is the direct result of precipitation that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets, and other hard (impervious) surfaces. Rather than being absorbed in to the ground, it pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins, and storm sewers. Stormwater also infiltrates into the soil and becomes ground water, is used by vegetation, or flows into lakes and/or streams as surface flow.

1.2 What problem does it cause?

Stormwater can carry harmful non-point source pollutants, cause flooding, erode topsoil and stream banks, destroy marine life habitats. In an area with natural ground cover, only 10% of rainwater becomes runoff. It is either absorbed or evaporates. In urban areas, up to 55% of rainfall can become stormwater runoff.

1.3 Why do we need to manage stormwater?

Urbanization causes significant changes in stormwater runoff characteristics, including increased volume and rate of runoff entering streams and the storm sewer infrastructure and reduced amounts of water filtering into the soil. Such changes cause increased erosion and formation of gullies in upland areas, increased in-stream scour and erosion, increased sediment deposition in lower areas, degradation of water quality, peak storm flows that are higher and faster, more frequent flooding, and negative effects on

streams ecological communities. These impacts on both man-made structures and natural systems require continuous management, maintenance, repair and replacement of the City's stormwater management system and careful planning to mitigate existing and future problems.

1.4 What is a 'stormwater utility' and how is it different from a stormwater management program?

A stormwater utility is a legally authorized "public enterprise fund", adopted by ordinance and similar to a water or sewer utility. It is established to finance stormwater management program activities exclusively. The stormwater management program includes all activities and services for Burlington. The City Council established a stormwater utility ordinance effective July 1, 2005.

1.5 Why do we need a "stormwater utility?"

With a utility, the City can develop and plan for a cost effective stormwater management program. The utility allows for a more reliable and equitable source of funding that is based on the demand that a given property places on the stormwater management system. Alternative funding sources include general fund revenues, fees and bonds. General fund revenues are based on the value of property and not the demand placed on the stormwater system. General funds are less stable for long term stormwater management planning and programming activities. Year to year budget cycles cannot be counted on for adequate funding levels for stormwater management services. The City now has significantly increasing regulatory requirements and local needs, and prior to the utility ordinance no increased resources were identified to meet these increasing needs and the mandatory requirements passed down by Federal and State authorities.

1.6 How will the stormwater management program benefit taxpayers, homeowners, etc.?

Based upon the level and extent of services being funded, the stormwater management program will include a wide variety of services and activities either present or in the future. The following are some of the primary services and activities:

- Illicit discharge and detection
- Public education and participation
- Public drainage and storm sewer maintenance, repair, and improvement
- Public/private Drainage Assistance Program
- National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) participation
- Flood mitigation activities (elevation, acquisition, flood proofing)
- Water quality improvement activities (regulatory and local needs based)
- Watershed and basin plans
- Cape Fear River Basin/Jordan Lake regional stakeholder activities
- Land Use Management Ordinance administration
- Stream restoration, monitoring and other beneficial programs
- Street sweeping and cleaning

1.7 Doesn't the City already take care of drainage and stormwater problems?

The City does currently provide a variety of stormwater management services. However, due to new federal, state and local regulations, population and development growth, aging infrastructure and limited staff and funding resources, the City cannot adequately meet the current demand. Ever increasing demands and regulations require that the City address stormwater management more aggressively.

2. Stormwater Management Administration and Operation

2.1 Is the program an entity separate from the City or a department within the City or something else?

The stormwater management program will operate within the City as a Division of the Public Works Department. It will continue to coordinate stormwater management activities of multiple City departments using both City resources and contract services. Existing City Departments expected to be most involved include Engineering, Planning, Inspections, Finance and Public Works.

2.2 How can citizens received information or provide input, complaints, etc. concerning the program?

Telephone:	Public Works Department	336-222-5005
	Engineering	336-222-5050
Email:	TBA	
Website	TBA	
Fax:	TBA	

2.3 What kind of public oversight or public involvement will this utility have?

Under requirement of its NPDES Stormwater permit, the City must establish a Citizens Group for input on stormwater issues and the stormwater program. Interested individuals should contact the Public Works Director at (336) 222-5005.

2.4 Will this require a staff increase?

Stormwater management staff resources will be increased from 0 to 1 full time employee in the first year. Further increases are expected and will depend on the level and extent of services to be implemented. The Engineering and Public Works Departments will likely require staff increases in subsequent years.

2.5 What kind of state and federal requirements does the City have to meet with regard to water resource issues?

The City participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) that requires administration of the federal regulations pertaining to floodplain management and other flood study related issues.

The City has received its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System – Phase 2 (NPDES Phase 2) stormwater permit to the NC Division of Water Quality (NCDWQ). This permit requires the Town to meet the measures outlined in the permit to reduce and mitigate non-point stormwater pollution. (A copy is available at h2O.enr.state.nc.us/su/documents/BurlingtonDraftPermit110104.pdf)

The City administers the NC Division of Water Quality's Water Supply Watershed development regulations.

The Town ensures that state and federal jurisdictional waters and wetlands are not impacted without proper certification from the Army Corps of Engineers and the state's Wetlands Certification Unit.

3. Fees and Funding

3.1 How will the stormwater management program be funded?

The program will be funded by a stormwater utility fee collected from all properties identified as having water and/or sewer service. The fee is based on the relative impact of each property on the stormwater management system.

3.2 How are fees calculated?

Fees are based on a flat fee of \$2.00 per month (\$4.00 on a bi-monthly billing).

3.3 How often/when will I get a bill? When is it due?

The utility billing cycle is bimonthly for residential and monthly for commercial.

3.4 How much is the annual fee for a single-family property?

The initial fee will be \$24.00/year for a single-family residence.

3.5 How much is the annual fee for commercial/industrial?

The initial fee is \$24.00/year

3.6 Why do residents pay the same as commercial/industrial?

The City is planning on implementing a billing system in the future that will be based on a properties amount of impervious surface. The City is in the process of upgrading its computer system and the current software and system is incapable of handling. Once funds are accumulated and a new billing system is implemented the burden of funding stormwater will shift from residential to the industrial/commercial customer.

3.7 Wouldn't it be easier and cheaper just to raise taxes to pay for the stormwater management program?

Although the previous years' funds for stormwater management were from the General Fund, taxes are not an equitable or reliable means to fund the stormwater management program. Equity is achieved when each property owner pays a fair share

based on the demand his or her property places on the stormwater management system. Each year the City establishes a budget, based on tax revenue and program needs throughout the City, both of which change from year to year. A stormwater management program is most efficiently and effectively operated on a reliable and consistent revenue stream that would be established through a fee-based approach.

3.8 What happens if I don't pay my stormwater fee?

All payments for the stormwater utility fee, the solid waste user fee and water and sewer charges whether full or partial payments should be applied to the customers account as follows: First, to any solid waste fee changes including arrearages, second, to any stormwater utility fee including arrearages, and third, to any water and sewer charges including arrearages. In the event of partial payments, the utility charges will be considered outstanding and the disconnection for non-payment will be enforced in accordance with City Code Section 37-45.

4. Specific Issues

4.1 When will the Town address the drainage problem going on in my yard or neighborhood?

One future goal of the stormwater management program is to perform more drainage maintenance projects on a public/private partnership basis. This is the Drainage Assistance Program administered through the Engineering Department, which will have a method of ranking and prioritizing drainage problems. The program will have limited funds during the initial years but it is expected to increase in subsequent years. Interested persons may contact the Engineering Department for additional information at (336) 222-5050 or visit the Engineering Department website at www.burlingtonnc.gov

4.2 My subdivision is new and has some amount of stormwater management already built in. Why do we have to pay the same rate as older neighborhoods with no stormwater management?

It has not yet been determined how a credit system would function, but we expect to provide credits for stormwater management improvements implemented either by individual property owners or by developers that exceed specified minimum requirements in the future. The size or type of parcel would likely be a factor in the credit system.

4.3 I live on top of a hill, and I don't ever have any drainage problems. Why would I have to pay for stormwater management services?

Impervious surface on your parcel places a certain demand on the stormwater system. Stormwater runoff generated by your property must be controlled and conveyed once it leaves your property so that it does not create problems for others. While certain projects funded by the program would address drainage problems on private properties, all property owners would receive indirect benefits from a properly maintained and operated stormwater management system for the entire City.

Stormwater management activities with broad benefits include keeping the public streets drained and cleared, making necessary stormwater infrastructure upgrades, reducing erosion and other pollutants that enter streams and lakes, protecting and restoring streams and other aquatic habitat areas and collection and conveying stormwater safely through all parts of the City. The major portion of the fees would provide for compliance with federal, state, and local regulations for water quality improvements; administration of the land use through development review, inspections, public involvement and educational programs; and responding to public health and safety issues that benefit all property owners. The City's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) activities and National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) flood map activities and associated administrative duties may also fall under the utility.

4.4 I live on the edge of the City and water drains on my property away from streets and public drainage structures. Why do I have to pay this fee?

Please see the previous discussion concerning indirect benefits of the program.

4.5 My property is at the bottom of a hill, and not the cause of increased flooding from uphill. Why do I have to pay this fee?

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4.5 Why is the fee not assessed according to the actual amount of impervious surface on a lot, rather than on a flat fee basis?

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